

The Life and Secrets of Steve Harrington by orphan_account

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Barb deserved better, But not to torture Will, Closet talk, Evil scientists back on their bullshit, F/F, Kidnapping, M/M, MLMWLW Solidarity, Needles, Psychic Abilities, Psychological torture (sorta), Steve has an interesting music taste, The Upside Down Returns eventually, The poor kid has been through enough, Very AU, discovering sexuality

Language: English

Characters: Billy Hargrove (mentioned), Dustin Henderson, Eleven, Holly Wheeler, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Will Byers

Relationships: Barbara "Barb" Holland/Nancy Wheeler, Jonathan Byers/Steve Harrington

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Summary:

A fic that came to me because of an old Wham! song (and the idea that Steve has an extensive music collection for plot reasons). It sort of just escalated from there.

Prior Warning: This may get dark at points (not darker than the TV show, but still)

1. Someone Disappears from Hawkins... Again

It has been a long couple of months for Steve Harrington.

His parents had disappeared right around the time Will Byers did, but he never got a chance to go to the cops because some lady- who at least claimed to be FBI- had said she and her partner would look into it.

And he still hasn't heard from her. But his missing parents are only part of the problem.

Another part is that Nancy is still the only person anyone at school- at least in the high school- thinks Steve wants to talk about. Billy. Carol. Tommy. All of them constantly update him on Nancy's behavior and its really starting to grate on his nerves.

The biggest part though, is the strange phenomena he's been experiencing lately, which comes in two possibly separate things.

The first thing is that he's been hearing things- auditory hallucinations, as Dustin explained when Steve mentioned it- a hollow knocking from the bottom of his pool. Screaming in the empty school hallways. And demodogs in his front yard that he can't see.

Dustin attributed this to possible PTSD. That only mildly terrifies Steve.

The second thing Steve has not talked about. To anyone. When he was younger, he'd had a talent for reading people's emotions. But lately, something has drastically changed with that. He started being able to feel other people's emotions.

Its mostly just very strong ones, and usually requires touch. He first noticed it when he passed his math teacher who'd just found out her husband was cheating and she stopped him with a hand on his shoulder to hand him his graded test. Luckily, he made it under the bleachers in the empty gym before he burst into tears. The second time, he and Billy were in an argument and Billy grabbed him. The crippling anxiety and stress and fear hit him so hard that it triggered

an almost immediate anxiety attack, and he hit the ground, unable to breathe. Jonathan ended up stepping in at that point.

Steve is pretty sure that he's losing his mind, his parents are still missing, and because of everything at school, including several old secrets on top of the new ones, he feels more alone than he has in years.

Steve tries not to think about any of this as he walks home- walking only because his car started leaking some weird red shit three days ago and he's pretty sure that's not safe to drive with, so he figures the garage is the safest place for it right now- Wham! humming over the speakers of his headphones as he makes the trek from school to home.

Its about a two hour walk. He's half an hour in. This half sucks less than the half that he has to do first thing in the morning (like five am). This morning he caught himself almost wishing that he was still close enough with Tommy that he could get a ride from him.

He brushes that nonsense off pretty quickly.

Steve only just notices the person coming up behind him the moment a sharp pain pierces his lower back. He doesn't even get the chance to cry out before the world washes into a dark, black nothingness.

"Guys, Steve's-"

"Been kidnapped? We know," Lucas responds to the panting Dustin who just burst through Mike's side basement door. Dustin sputters.

"What? How do you know?"

"El sensed it," Mike says. El nods softly.

"It was like a... screaming..." El says. "In here."

As she taps her temple, Dustin frowns. Max and Will were both

sitting on the floor. Will looks concerned.

“How did you know, Dustin?” Will asks.

“I found his Walkman...” Dustin holds up the discarded device, a battered, pink, and silver device. ‘Property of Steve Harrington’ is written in black sharpie on the side. “He’s like physically attached to this thing, he wouldn’t just leave it on the sidewalk. Is he...?”

He doesn’t have to finish that sentence before El shakes her head. Will stands, putting his arm around Dustin’s shoulder. It’s in that moment that Dustin realizes he’s still trembling like a leaf.

“So what do we do now?” Max asks, leg bouncing in her usual impatient fidgeting.

“We tell my mom,” Will says. “And Jonathan.”

“Nancy and Hopper too,” Mike adds. “They’ll know how to fix this.”

“For Steve’s sake... I sure hope so,” Dustin says, squeezing Will’s hand. Then, feeling his eyes sting, he looks down. “Fuck.”
The room falls quiet in this moment.

2. No, My Name is Steve

The incessant hum of the fluorescent lights kicks in as it does every... day?... its been hard for Steve to tell how much time is passing, what with the room they hold him in not having any windows, and none of the halls or other rooms he goes to do either. But he knows that means Dr. Wingley- the newest scientist in charge of the kind of place that Eleven came from- is about to enter.

Sitting up, he stares down the door. It opens, and after a moment, the tall, serious, salt and pepper haired man enters. He doesn't close the door, and two... orderlies? Guards? Steve isn't sure... wait outside. That means there will be another 'exercise' today. Another day of Steve being forced to use his 'gifts'- clairaudience and psychic empathy- which were the phenomena he'd been experiencing that Dustin had thought were signs of some mental illness.

"Are you ready to work with projecting today, Seventeen?"

"My name is Steve."

The man cackles, cupping Steve's cheek with vague amusement. "Seventeen, I've told you this before. No one here knows you by that name... and no one cares what you want to be called. You are an experiment. You will be addressed as such. You are Seventeen."

"No, my name is Steve..."

The sensation of being backhanded is sharp, leaving a burning pain from Steve's cheekbone to jaw. Dr. Wingley no longer looks amused. Steve glowers silently. The doctor turns, motioning to the 'gorderlies' to escort Steve to whatever room Steve's exercise is being held in today.

Today's room is much like an interrogation room in a police station. A mirror that is most likely a window for any number of scientists on the other side, a table with a radio sitting on it, and chairs on either side.

Steve is roughly guided to the side opposite the mirror.

“Now then, Seventeen. Today’s exercise is simple,” Dr. Wingley states. “All you have to do is make us hear something you can hear, using this,” He points to the radio.

“So that’s what projecting means?”

“Yes, Seventeen.”

Steve almost corrects the doctor on his name again, but he bites his tongue. It’s been like this for- if the ‘visits’ with Dr. Wingley have been daily- almost three months now. Steve has learned that the doctor angers quickly, and the kinds of psychological punishment that this place can unleash are far worse than a little slap across the face.

And he’s hoping to make it out of here at least somewhat like his old self, so he’s better off avoiding more punishments.

Closing his eyes, Steve focuses. His mind immediately picks up a familiar tune. The source is somewhere happier, somewhere far from here. Clenching his jaw, hands gripping the edge of the table until the knuckles are white, Steve pushes that heavy weight between the psychic force and the electric one that pulses from the radio.

“Wake me up, before you go-go,” A teenage girl’s voice crackles over the radio, the sound of running water in the background. “Don’t leave me hanging on like a yo-yo, Wake me up-”

The sound snaps away, Steve slumps back in his chair. His nose is bleeding. He’s exhausted. That took more energy than he initially expected. Dr. Wingley grins, gently clapping a hand on his shoulder. “Good job, Seventeen. You’ve done well. Go, rest. Someone will bring you food in an hour.”

Steve drifts off, despite the incessant buzzing of the lights. Curled on the stiff, uncomfortable bed, he drifts into something not unlike a dream.

Its dark. He's in a space that is total darkness, except for water beneath the soles of the laceless sneakers he'd been given the first day he was here. He treads forward a few paces, that water rippling and dripping beneath his steps. And then, a voice:

"Steve?"

He turns. El stands a few paces ahead. At first, he's confused. Then, she extends a hand.

"Its okay... it really is me..."

Closing the distance, Steve sets his palm against hers. All at once, he is overwhelmed with a feeling of relief- his empathic abilities kicking in even in this place. Steve drops to his knees, tears burning his eyes.

"Where are you, Steve?"

"...With them. With the men who used you. The- the bad men," Steve says, remembering when Dustin explained how the boys all met El.

"They hurt you?"

"Only when I argue... or if an exercise fails."

"...We'll take you back," El reassured. Then, her gaze flicked up, as if she was being spoken to by someone outside of this space they talked in. "I have to go. Its okay. We are coming."

Steve wakes sobbing. The room is now dark. His tray of food waits on the little side table. The same food they usually give him- a fruit cup, a bottle of water, and six chicken nuggets- all waiting as promised.

Sitting up, he reaches for a nugget, only pausing to wipe blood from his nose.

3. Taking Back Steve

The lights flicker on again, this time causing Steve to bury his face in a pillow.

He has a bad feeling about today. A really, really bad feeling. He doesn't think he's precognitive on top of everything else- though he did hear Dr. Wingley suggest it at one point- but he just gets a sense that whatever exercise is coming today, it isn't going to be good.

Steve sits up just as the door opens. Dr. Wingley steps inside, his hands behind his back, and a shit eating grin on his wrinkled face.

"Good morning, Seventeen. I have good news."

Oh fuck. That couldn't be good. That sounded like the opposite of good. "...alright, what's up?"

"We're trying a new exercise today. There are some folks here who lost something. You're going to retrieve it." He says this matter of factly, like it's something he knows for a fact that Steve can do. Steve frowns in confusion.

"And I'm doing that... how exactly?"

"It's really quite similar to projecting, but, with your whole, physical self. Here," With this, Dr. Wingley produces a plain, silver Walkman out from behind his back. "This has a Queen tape in it. You may listen as we prepare for the experiment."

With the doctor waiting expectantly, Steve puts on the headphones, his pulse beating a mile a minute. It's been- again, if these exercises are daily- two weeks since he's heard from El. If they really are coming soon, now would be nice. Now would be really nice, because Steve isn't sure he'll survive this exercise if he fails.

As Freddie Mercury begins singing about the pressures he and his friends experience in their day to day lives, and David Bowie joins in soulfully crooning about love, Steve stands. The door opens and the gorderlies flank him and Dr. Wingley as they walk down the hall that

starts feeling narrower and narrower. Steve closes his eyes for a moment wishing he could zone out long enough to talk to El.

And then the song changes to We Will Rock You and the sudden stomping makes Steve jump.

They've cuffed his legs to a small platform, which looks like it will lower him into the water. Steve stares up at the people in the observation room above, debating flipping them off. Dr. Wingley sets a hand on his shoulder as if sensing this debate. "Now then, Seventeen, it is imperative that you focus. We will not be retrieving you from the water, so, should things go wrong, this is the end of our time together. Don't disappoint me."

Steve bites back the sarcastic 'wow, thanks' and nods quietly. He's petrified, truth be told. Things have happened here, the punishments-the room with walls that inch closer if he moves too much; the box that pins him to the ground, slowly flooding until only his nose and bangs remain above water; the room with cold metal floors and a deceptively soft bed that violently tremors and shrieks and cackles sporadically throughout the night- have all changed little bits of him. He's easier to terrify now than the boy who, months ago, was blindly following a group of kids into the upside down in order to keep them safe. And the idea of drowning is... unpleasant... to say the least.

The platform shifts. He's being lowered. The shock of the cold water makes him flinch at first. Then, as he sinks, and it travels further up his body, he gives in, letting it numb him. By the time he's fully submerged, Steve's eyes are closed.

At first nothing happens. He opens his eyes, glancing up towards the people. God, they seem so far away down here. Clenching his fists, Steve closes his eyes, focuses, and-

Nothing.

Okay. Okay. Don't panic. Just focus. Focus and you won't die.

Bubbles pass between his lips. His lungs begin to burn. Steve looks

back up at the people above water frantically. One of them is shaking their head. Another is laughing. Dr. Wingley is turning away. They really are just going to let him die.

Snapping his eyes shut, Steve screams.

The intercom between the observation deck and the actual experiment erupts with sound on both ends, the voice of someone desperate not to die. Then, it spreads to intercoms throughout the building, and pops onto radios in experiment rooms, startling experiments and scientists alike. Next, it reaches the radios of cars in the parking lot. Then, it reaches the radios in Sheriff Hopper's pickup truck, startling him and explaining why his daughter gripped her ears moments before. Finally, it reaches the radio of Jonathan Byer's car just behind, widening the eyes of all within, and bringing one curly haired boy to tears.

"That's Steve's voice," Dustin says grimly.

Dr. Wingley turns back to the pool to see Steve has vanished, leaving, where he stood, a hole black and empty, looking charred despite that it's below the icy depths of the water.

4. Lost and Found

When Steve finally stops screaming, it's because the air around him is, well, air. Looking around, Steve takes in the oddness around him. Much like the pool he was lowered into, the pool is the same depth, but it is cracked and decaying. He still remains on the same lowered platform, but the cuffs have rusted away to nothing, and thus no longer hold him in. The air is filled with the same wisps as before, like dandelion seeds blown away by a small child's wish. Oddly innocent for the hellscape he's beginning to realize he's entered.

The Upside Down. Or the Shadowfell, as the boys called it.

Stepping off the platform, he glances around a moment more before spotting a pile of rubble to his left. It's just high enough that he should be able to climb out of the pool from the top of it. Picking his way up, experiencing only two shifts beneath him that cause him to waver for a moment. Gritting his teeth, he eventually makes his way to the top, climbing rather clumsily onto the edge of the now empty pool.

As he treks back down a familiar set of hallways, Steve comes to a certain realization. The air here doesn't hurt to breathe like it did the last time. He's not sure if that has to do with his powers or not, but he's guessing that's why.

The doors come into view, and when he steps outside, what he sees shocks him to the core.

A clearing just behind the school, through a dense forest. The single floor building is in the center of that clearing, nestled in thick, tall grass. Shuffling through it, hearing it crunch beneath his shoes, he made his way to the forest edge.

And this is where his empathic abilities picked it up. Something angry, but like, not a kind of anger he's ever picked up on before. No. This is primal. Something only an animal or some kind of monster could give off. Something like-

Hearing a familiar snarling, Steve's heart stopped. Demodogs.

Coming in guns blazing was fairly easy with El's help. Doors swung open at the simple raise of an eyebrow. As for the people, Nancy, Hopper, and Jonathan did pretty good at that, knocking them out of the way. Max had stayed behind in the car with Will, Mike, and Lucas. Dustin was following with the main troop, Steve's walkman clutched in his hands.

Finding Steve was a bit more complicated. They ducked up and down a couple of halls, El muttering about 'following traces, not a real person'. After a moment, they came bursting through the doors of an observation deck. And at first, they were ready for a fight. And then Nancy gasped out something that froze everyone in their tracks.

"Mister and Missus Holland?